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## **Taking Action: Diversity in American Institutions**

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**Date Submitted:** April 23, 2016

### **Kirmser Award**

Kirmser Undergraduate Research Award - Individual Freshman category, grand prize

### **How to cite this manuscript**

If you make reference to this paper, use the citation:

Winkler, S. (2016). Taking Action: Diversity in American Institutions. Retrieved from <http://krex.ksu.edu>

### **Abstract & Keywords**

My project was a persuasive research paper. This paper required me to find a position on a controversial topic and persuade a resistant audience to consider my view. In addition to this, the argument needed to be multi-sided and I needed to find common ground between my view and my audience's. My topic was using affirmative action in institutions because it benefits the economy and decreases racial discrimination. My resistant audience believed the opposite.

**Keywords:** Affirmative action, Employment Institutions

### **Course Information**

**School:** Kansas State University  
**Course Title:** Expository Writing 2  
**Instructor:** Roxana Loza

**Semester:** Spring 2016  
**Course Number:** ENGL 200-AP

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ENGL 200-AP

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4/20/16

Revision

### Taking Action: Diversity in American Institutions

In the past few years, race and opportunity have become forefront issues in American social and political discussions. The activism that has been seen across the country is reflective of the movements from the 1960s. Just in the last couple of months, many were outraged when the Oscars released a list of dominantly white actors, actresses, directors, and so on as the nominees for this year's awards. The backlash sparked a new social media movement that went by the hashtag "OscarsSoWhite." Through their posts, people expressed their frustration at the lack of representation in award shows and film in general. Many are demanding that The Academy, as well as the film industry, increase diversity and opportunity for minorities. This is not only true for Hollywood, but institutions that employ working Americans all over this nation.

Affirmative action is one practice that has been proposed in the past to fix this situation. The definition of affirmative action, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is "the practice of improving the educational and job opportunities of members of groups that have not been treated fairly in the past because of their race, sex, etc" ("Affirmative Action"). F. Michael Higginbotham, professor of law and author, states in his NY Times article that race-based action is still needed in today's society because racial disparities are still being seen all across the U.S. (Higginbotham). He explains that one of the problems is that affirmative action is seen as a

“racial preference” rather than a “justified remedy” (Higginbotham). In his view, if people continue to believe that affirmative action creates preference, then we will not be able to take care of the racial preference that is going on right now. The racial disparities include poverty, homelessness, racial profiling, and more (Higginbotham). Those that support affirmative action aim to fight these disparities by creating more opportunities for minorities and women.

There are reasonable objections to affirmative action as a means to promote diversity. Those that oppose this idea believe that it actually does more harm than good. In the article, “The Case Against Affirmative Action,” the Stanford Magazine points out that preferring minorities for the sake of affirmative action actually promotes discrimination (Sacks and Thiel). They argue that often, under qualified minorities are admitted to college before qualified whites, which is the opposite of fairness and limits opportunities for those that show more merit (Sacks and Thiel). Although they also agree that equality for all is important, they believe that affirmative action hurts opportunity and equality. I have looked at both sides of this argument and read through research that is both for and against affirmative action. The conclusion that I have come to is that making those opportunities more accessible for minorities with affirmative action-like movements is actually beneficial because it will increase opportunities for everyone and therefore improves the situation of racial discrimination.

The writers Sacks and Thiel make compelling points in their article about how affirmative action can actually do more harm than good. It is clear that they highly value equality and opportunity. I too believe that opportunity and equality for all is extremely important, but I do disagree about their position on affirmative action. The research that I have come across has stated that affirmative action is not only important for opportunity, it is vital. Scholar and founder of the journal *The Black Scholar* Robert Chrisman has studied issues of race for a large

portion of his life, and has also focused on affirmative action. He states in his article “Affirmative Action: Extend It” that affirmative action does not seek to create racial preference, but to address the racial preference that already exists (Chrisman). He points out that black family income is fifty-six percent of white family income, and thirty percent of black men in every major city are unemployed (Chrisman). He concludes his article by stating that affirmative action “advocates the principle of a structured readjustment and redistribution of economic resources and opportunities to redress inequities among various social and ethnic groups” (Chrisman). Chrisman’s article shows that racial preference already exists, and it typically supports those who are white. In other words, if we are to achieve a more opportune world that Sacks and Thiel support, then affirmative action must be used to counteract the preference that already exists.

I think it is important to point out exactly how these ideologies against affirmative action were created. According to politician Jesse L. Jackson, who has worked closely with these issues, the idea that affirmative action creates what many call “reverse racism” dates back to the late 1990s. During this time period, affirmative action was used as a source of blame for economic distress (Jackson). However, it was not affirmative action causing this distress, but rather the globalization of the economy and companies sending their plants overseas (Jackson). As a result of fear, people began to blame affirmative action for their job loss because it discriminated against them for being white and gave their jobs to minorities. I believe that these people had every right to be fearful and their claims about affirmative action were reasonable. However, it is clear that their opportunity in life was not being destroyed by affirmative action. In fact, Jackson explains how affirmative action can benefit everyone. He points out that women having more access to employment creates two-income households which makes it possible for

parents to provide for their children (Jackson). And a diversified economy not only makes us a more race-inclusive society, but it helps us compete in the global economy that is still expanding (Jackson). Sacks and Thiel care about making opportunity fair and equal to everyone, and I agree. Which is why I believe affirmative action should be considered when dealing with the problem at hand.

Affirmative action is not just supported by liberals and minorities. It is a concept that everyone can support. Conservative James A. Buford in his article “Affirmative Action Works,” defends his position on being pro-affirmative action. Buford looks deeply into past affirmative action legislation. He looks at Order 11246 which was established by President Johnson. This legislation, and the ones that came before and after it, in no way established quotas that may have resulted in employers picking an under-qualified minority over a qualified white person (Buford). Buford explains what the legislation does very simply. He states that employers are allowed to hire whoever they want, but are required to set goals to hire minorities/women that are qualified for the position based on whether said positions are available or not (Buford). This is incredibly different than giving an employer a quota that says they are required to hire a certain number of black people or a certain number of women. It allows the employer to do as they wish with the availability that they have, but keep in mind creating a workforce that is diversified.

It is important that everyone get the same opportunities. I like how Sacks and Thiel were considering the opportunities of non-minorities in their paper, but I also think it's important to focus on the opportunities those who face the most discrimination. My evidence has showed that affirmative action has been active since the late 1900s, but that doesn't mean it's still not necessary today. I already mentioned the situation in Hollywood and the Oscars, but

discrimination exists in other institutions as well. According to the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan data and analysis website, released a statistic that the 2013 wealth gap between blacks and whites was at its highest point since 1989 (Drake). It is not just African Americans who fall behind. The American Progress reported that even though Latinos are going to college at a higher rate, they still fall behind significantly compared to their white counterparts (Cardenas and Kerby). We know that discrimination is wrong, on all levels and no matter who it is happening to. There are currently hundreds of thousands of minorities facing that discrimination, and they deserve to have a similar concern and help extended to them. If we truly care about ending racial preference and diversifying America, we should consider all ways to help those who need it. These disparities will not go away on their own. And even though it may be the year 2016, it doesn't mean that these issues aren't relevant.

During his opening monologue at the Oscars this year, host Chris Rock stated "We want black actors to get the same opportunities." Women and minorities everywhere just want to get the same opportunities not just in film, but in all institutions. And almost all Americans just want the same opportunities and equality. The arguments against affirmative action are legitimate and understandable. We want to be sure that we are fighting racial preference, not creating more of it. It is clear that people on both sides of this are striving for the same thing- to create a nation without discrimination. Research has shown that affirmative action has been able to fight existing racial preference in the past without creating more discrimination. There have been a lot of misconceptions about what the policies actually do, but in no way do they limit the opportunities of non-minorities. If we truly want to end preference and discrimination, I believe considering affirmative action as a tool to do so would make a positive difference in our society.

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